

Training Foresight



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In a rural area near Ste. Genevieve, Mo., just south of St.

Louis, a mammoth project is under way to build the largest single kiln cement plant in the world. The Holcim Cement Plant is one of the largest industrial manufacturing operations in the Midwest - more than a mile long and sprawled over 1,700 acres. When fully operational after its completion in 2009, it will produce approximately four million metric tons of cement per year. And it is by far the largest electrical contract ever in the jurisdiction of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local #1, which covers St. Louis and 25 Missouri counties stretching to Arkansas.

As big as it is, though, Holcim shares something in common with the countless other projects performed in IBEW Local #1's jurisdiction. Its success will reflect the foresight of a diligent investment in training.

As the first local chartered by the international union in 1891, IBEW Local #1 is just about as old as the commercial use of electricity itself. But IBEW Local #1 also gave birth to electrical apprenticeship training in 1941. The training school has moved three times in St. Louis before finally landing at its present location at 2300 Hampton where it opened in 1967 with 205 apprentices enrolled.

Faced with ever accelerating market needs in the 1990s, IBEW and its partner, the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA), St. Louis Chapter,

made a momentous decision to invest \$1.4 million in a technology upgrade of the Electrical Industry Training Center. The improvements responded to owner needs to keep pace with fast growing building systems work - including voice-data, fire alarm, security and controls work. The training center under the guidance of Apprenticeship Coordinator Dennis Gralike has continually looked forward to advance a stewardship that has made St. Louis home to the best trained electricians and communication technicians in the country.

Today, the Electrical Industry Training Center employs 36 instructors with a cumulative 1,100 years experience in the electrical industry. All are certified by the Missouri Dept. of Primary and Secondary Education and belong to the Missouri Vocational Association.

To stay current on the rapid technology advancements in the electrical industry, instructors attend re-certification classes annually at the renowned National Training Institute in Knoxville, Tenn. The four-year program covers up to 45 advanced training programs in such areas as data technology, telecommunications, total building automation, audiovisual systems, security systems, emergency call systems including programmable fire alarm, instrumentation and process control. Meanwhile, on-going education at other venues continues year round.

More than 1,200 students are currently enrolled in the Electrical Industry Training Center, including about 500 apprentices and more than 700 journey-level electricians. In fact, since 1994, there has been a 450 percent increase in the number of students enrolled. The increase is due to IBEW/NECA's persistent efforts

to prepare the current and next generation of electricians for new technologies.

In 2007, this effort to "go the extra mile" was demonstrated once again. The Electrical Industry Training Center, heeding the industry's call for greater risk management, finished an exhaustive safety training initiative. In 14 months, it not only achieved OSHA 10 Certification for IBEW Local # 1's entire 3,400 construction workforce, but 70 percent of that workforce achieved the higher standard OSHA 30 Certification. Not surprisingly, Holcim requires OSHA 10 training for all construction workers and OSHA 30 training for all supervisors.

IBEW/NECA currently spends \$2.5 million annually in apprenticeship and journey-level training. As the Holcim project and other much smaller projects ramp up, this dedication to maintaining the highest skilled and safest workforce will continue, if only for one simple reason - it's all about the customer.



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